

Tuesday, August 30, 2011  
DE Notes\Ambiguity, Delegation, DMs

Two premises that caught my personal attention in Albert Wohlstetter's work<sup>1</sup> were:

- 1) any warning of imminent attack—strategic, but even tactical—would necessarily and in every case be “ambiguous”;
- 2) This ambiguity would have behavioral consequences for the decision-maker; specifically, it would slow down organizational response time, at every level, from those reporting on warning up through the chain of command and in the President's or JCS' circle.

I was especially struck by the use of the term “ambiguity,” which by 1957 I was already conceptualizing as distinct from “risk”—uncertainty that could be represented by precise, known probabilities—and which could have distinct behavioral responses. (See “Risk, Ambiguity and the Savage Axioms, which was not published until 1961). AJW could have said, simply, “uncertainty” (with possibility of Type I or Type errors, which usually presume definite probabilities). But what he described fitted into my concept of “ambiguity.”

He also argued that the SU could foresee this effect, and could deliberately shape its attack to increase the ambiguity (as well as to seek “surprise”—“no warning” attack--a related but distinct aim and phenomenon): thus delaying, slowing any attempt to reduce vulnerability or to attack).<sup>i</sup> They could do this before the attack, by “spoofing.” And initial sorties could be low-level and/or individual, or by submarine cruise missiles against coastal targets.

Delay in a command decision (by the president, or other) in launching strategic weapons in the face of ambiguity could have two sorts of bad effects:

- 1) Making our own forces (including command and control) more vulnerable, losing them to attack (preventing or reducing damage-limitation, or retaliation).<sup>ii</sup>
- 2) Making the opponent's forces and C3 less vulnerable or subject to prompt destruction, again making damage-limitation (and prevailing) less feasible, since their first-wave forces (presumably subject to ragged takeoff) and their second-wave forces would mostly have taken off.

The latter consideration points to the earliest possible launching of our attack, not only to protect our forces (1 above) but to make them effective in protecting our population and

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<sup>1</sup> [esp. R-290: when exactly did I get my—“provisional”?—top secret clearance, so that I could see R-290? Was there a Secret version of it? Was it before, during, or after my summer work in 1958? ]

C3. That would lead to military pressures to act on “strategic” warning, before enemy forces had been launched: e.g., the early stages of a limited conflict, especially in Europe, that was likely to escalate (even though—or particularly if—there was no indication that Soviet strategic forces were on high alert (they weren’t, in Cuba II) or preparing to attack). (As Dr. Strangelove suggested, this situation could arise even if there were a US accidental launch or an unauthorized launch (as in *Crimson Tide*): which could be motivated by someone’s desire to “be a catalyst” for a full-scale US attack with no warning to the Soviets, not in a crisis. As in *Dr. Strangelove*, or *Twilight’s Last Gleaming*. Or a Soviet launch, likewise. Or a terrorist weapon, even though perceived by both sides as possibly such: each could fear that the other would not so perceive it, or that the other would fear that it would not so perceive it or would see an opportunity to exploit it. See Aum Shinrykyo’s ambition. Or Israel’s Samson Option! Or South Africa’s, or France! Or Khrushchev’s fear that Germany, possessing nuclear weapons (as, in effect, it did, in 1960!) could trigger the US machine! (ref, recently?)

The Positive Control system, if it were designed to work perfectly (say, with PALs on all weapons, code controlled only at the highest levels), would obviate many of these dangers. But why was the physical embodiment of these controls (PALs, and reliable authentication) so resisted by the military?

Was it just to prevent the vulnerability of our forces, in a crisis? (The reality was that SAC was NOT vulnerable in 1958-64, and I strongly suspect that it was not only the Army and Navy intelligence, and Eisenhower and Gates, that recognized this, but USAF and SAC as well, though they claimed otherwise. See their predictions of limited deaths in the US from a US first strike, over Berlin.)

(In arguing with the SAC Chief of Intelligence and war plans, what was I trying to achieve? Their withdrawing their optimistic estimates of casualties from a US first strike, toughness on Berlin? (I didn’t really disagree with Chayes; I didn’t favor even the threat of a FS, prior to the new estimate, though I was more than sad at the idea of compromising Berlin).

Or was I trying to get them to reduce their “worst case” estimate: down, say, to parity. (Why? Why did I care? Parity would still have argued against a FS. I didn’t know the reality, which was as low as the Army and Navy said; I wasn’t arguing for that, nor did Andy Marshall ever indicate that. In fact, he was still thinking about D-L, **which was an illusory problem in 1959-62, for the US**; he saw SU forces as vulnerable, either in first-strike or second-strike mode: **not as non-existent against the US** (still essentially true in the Cuban crisis in 1962 (like Hussein’s WMD’s). They were not non-existent then against Europe, they could have been subject to US CF D-L attack, though without high confidence of averting destruction of Europe.)

I may have simply been pointing out, to Leibman and then to SAC Intell, a logical contradiction in their premises, without a clear policy agenda in mind in resolving it.



I now suspect that a major reason for the military's preserving effective organizational automaticity of response, by delegation and resisting PALs, was not to protect our forces but to assure their **prompt** commitment in a situation of "warning," to exploit the opportunity of their destroying SU forces and C3 (and society!) and achieving "decisive" results (see USAF comments on the definition of general war) and prevailing (and achieving the final solution of the Communist problem: in the SU Bloc and China. See quotes in Power and Madness on desire to prevent "existence" of Communism). (See Khrushchev's warnings about elements in Germany; that was true for the US, too!)

Thus, our military wanted to protect against, to prevent the effects of, "undue" civilian and presidential **delay** (as the Russian Chief of Staff feared the tsar's delay in ordering mobilization)—(b) unwillingness to launch general war, or (c) desire to recall it, on second thought, or on "unreliable" (or even reliable!) SU efforts to surrender or to reassure us or to negotiate. Or to order an infeasible limitation on our attack, for which preparations and plans did not exist, or which in any case our military thought totally inappropriate under the circumstances.

In other words, the military wanted to be able to **circumvent** presidential indecision, delay, "lily-livered, craven" scruples against mass death, (lack of the military's desire to annihilate the SU or China), or inappropriate decision to interfere in what the military saw as essential action.

They wanted to be able, in a crisis, to be sure to Go, and to GO promptly and early enough, on a large-enough scale, to be decisive, achieve victory, and protect American society from (possible) utter destruction. And they knew, from experience, that a civilian president (or even a former high commander!) might fatally delay that escalation or preemption (LeMay, and some others, may even have dreamed of "prevention": but that was ruled out by high policy-makers and not pressed by many other military) or even prevent it altogether or "screw it up" (by not hitting China, or some other withhold; they may even have feared a rejection of decapitation, unwillingness to hit Moscow, though they thought of that as essential early).

They had experienced this delay or reticence even with Eisenhower (Taiwan Straits and desire for CTB; maybe, Hungary); definitely with JFK (C-I, the Wall, VN combat units, Diem assassination, desire for CTB, new SIOP?). And LBJ/McNamara constraints on VN and bombing! And B-70, and ABM.) (Not Nixon, I presume!) Then, Carter and his interest in minimum deterrence! (Not, Reagan! But see Reykjavik!) (Were Bush moves highly unpopular?) Clinton they didn't trust at all; nor BHO! (see his delay on escalating troops in Afghanistan; and his limitations on Libya). (Bush/Cheney, a different story: the military were holding them back! And Rumsfeld was fired when he joined them!)

(they didn't fight my SIOP, in principle—e.g. withholds--, as much as I might have expected. Was that because they saw "war-fighting" in it, thanks to WWK, and as the USAF requests for MM indicated? Athens and Ann Arbor encouraged that; (and Gilpatric!); which led to McNamara's backing down from my concepts, publicly and rhetorically, to keep a lid on MM (without modifying plans for CF-D-L, and without



trying actually to **reduce** any forces; in fact, he went along with MIRV in part to prevent pressure to increase MM, in response to SU buildup. **Thus, he went for the ridiculous “triad”** as a supposed requirement for “assured destruction,” Type I deterrence—obviously assured by Polaris alone--when it wasn’t necessary even for Type II, Europe, given accuracy improvements in Poseidon, and the infeasibility of D-L anyway. Did Schlesinger’s “flexible response” options still give some credibility to coercive strategies to protect Europe, i.e. in terms of the possibility (in SU eyes) that we might believe that might work, and limit the war? ((If so, was the SU response to that—plus to decapitation—the McGregor blitzkrieg strategy? Counting on NATO delay in giving an execute order to anything, in view of US apparent concern about all-out war?))

The “triad” has served only to preserve land-based missiles for 45 years, unnecessarily and destabilizing as they are. (In the latter sense, they do preserve a FS preemptive threat against SU attack in Europe—unnecessary for twenty years—precisely because they are vulnerable, and could attract SU preemptive attack; and because they add to the Trident CF threat, promptly, supposedly adding to our incentive to attack preemptively; on both counts, preserving a threat to behave unrealistically and irrationally in the event of a major SU attack in Europe, which has not been a possibility for twenty years or more.)

Thus, the possibility of an effective military “coup” against the president, forcing his hand by bypassing him in launching an attack and preventing him from recalling it or fatally modifying it, has been deliberately kept alive, not to permit a rogue base commander (as in Dr. Strangelove) from starting the way (though it preserves that possibility) but to permit the JCS or USAF/SAC to do that, protecting our ability not to **retaliate** on a large scale to a Soviet first-strike attack, but to protect our ability to **forestall** a large-scale Soviet first-strike or second-strike, protect our ability to **survive** as a society (possible in 1958-63, impossible since!) and **to achieve “victory”** (in some esoteric sense, even since 1963: though Reagan was right in saying “nuclear war cannot be won”).

The JCS have sought to protect **their** ability to achieve these goals (apart from revenge, punishment, retaliation, and from the Type I deterrence furthered by that capacity), from being thwarted in a severe crisis by a president or his advisors and staff.

That is in violation of their sworn oaths to “defend and support” the Constitution, which makes the civilian president their Commander-in-Chief (and for that matter, puts the decision to go to “war” in the hands of Congress; presidents have joined the military in ignoring that Constitutional requirement, in the nuclear age (even for conventional conflict)).

But the military have seen their obligation as to “protect the country” (as BHO mistakenly described his own oath) even when, in a nuclear crisis, that might “necessitate, require” their preempting presidential decision, attacking before he had decided to do so, or when he did not want to do so, or in ways he did not want (even, against countries he did not want to be at war with). They do not trust most civilian authorities to make appropriate decisions on war, and feel they have ample experience to



justify that lack of trust. That's true even in non-nuclear war, but they have gone along with, accepting "civilian control," since the nation's survival, or victory over the Soviets or China, was not at stake. But when both of those were implicated, on the edge of nuclear war, they were not willing—so I infer, from the C3 system of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies at least—to forego their own ability to act on their own judgment (or even, perhaps, that of lower military commanders) when the president might delay or disagree. (In WWI, plans for preemptive mobilization and attack required a decision within days or a week or two; in WWII, minutes count, though discussion might take days in a situation of an escalating conflict).

Not only has Congress lost control (totally, when it comes to nuclear war planning) but so has the president, and not only inadvertently but also deliberately by policy of the military (I believe). (Can I make this plausible enough to publish it? See LeMay to me. See LeMay on "my policy" and actions of Power in Cuba II.

## END NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Pearl Harbor: Roberta Wohlstetter's work on intelligence "noise," creating ambiguity as to the target of the Japanese navy; Barbarossa (Stalin simply could not believe the warnings he was receiving);

The point above: Normandy: disinformation creating ambiguity as to the location of the main effort, even after the landing at Normandy, so that the Germans delayed the commitment of reserves;

Cuba II: assurances by Khrushchev, perhaps deliberately, increased the ambiguity of intelligence, which partly derived from the unreliability of sightings of Soviet missiles, whether they were of SAMs or "offensive" missiles (also, ambiguity about the Soviet assurances that their equipment was "defensive" or offensive.) Efforts to create a *fait accompli* (*fait malaccompli*).

--Kaufmann's first strike plan in 1961, use of a small number of attacking planes, low-level under radar, against a small number of targets, instead of "bomb as you go" creating corridors for follow-on forces. Soviets could have something similar, as AJW put it: a "Soviet-preferred Soviet attack" rather than a "USAF-preferred Soviet attack."

--possibility of "spoofing" maneuvers against US warning systems, to create ambiguity.

See the ambiguity associated with the August 4 "attacks" in the Tonkin Gulf. (Lack of electronic communications, or radar; unreliability of visual sightings; contrary tactical warning from the two ships, radar and sonar.

See similar situation with WMI's in Iraq.

Contradiction between USAF/CIA/INR estimates of SU ICBMs in 1961 and Army/Navy estimates. Lack of total recon coverage. Elint.

<sup>ii</sup> (In this event, lack of retaliation would simply deprive us of "revenge, punishment"; but the prospect of possibly losing this would be counter-deterrent, an "invitation" to attack (especially preemptive attack). Also as the USAF (and JCS?) saw it, the failure to demolish Soviet (and Chinese!) societies would leave them dominant, viable, "prevailing" (horrors!), able to dominate the world including the demolished US.

(From another point of view, it would preserve them as a source of rebuilding the US—Europe might also have been destroyed, or at least be dominated—as we rebuilt Germany after WWII; and it would mean several hundred million people less killed, in the world (if that mattered!); and (unknown to us then) it would have greatly lessened the likelihood of nuclear winter, killing everyone.

(The "alternative undertaking" of pure city-busting, which all the JCS agreed on (at least, Air Force and Navy) would have had a great likelihood of causing nuclear winter, destroying life on earth as "collateral damage" incidental to our revenge against the Soviets. Survivors in the US would have been condemned by this, even after a Soviet attack. The peculiarity of Air Force planning was to do this (even more surely, but only



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marginally so) even in a US first strike. Thus, the US (and the rest of the Northern Hemisphere, perhaps the globe) would be annihilated by US attacks either striking first or second.)

(Laymen thought—wrongly--this would happen just from fallout; or by a deliberate use of cobalt bombs. But there was no point in using cobalt bombs—say, on our own territory, to eliminate the delivery problem—as long as we had a large bomber force that could survive (problematic, according to AJW) and penetrate (yes: SU AA was totally inadequate) to deliver “conventional nuclear weapons” (!).

**However, that could have made some sense (!) for SU deterrence, given the extreme limits of their delivery capability against the US (not against Europe). Thus, Dr. Strangelove's DM. And the actual test of the huge Soviet bombs in 1961: Tsar Bomba and three others! (What was their delivery capability for these? Could their Bisons have carried them, or Bomba? Only the Bear? Any ICBM?)**

Note that the DM concept by HK was only rationalized, or optimal, as a “cheap” (and sure) substitute for an elaborate, complex, expensive system of bombers and missiles to deliver a retaliatory second-strike: Type I deterrence. It wouldn't substitute for a damage-limiting preemptive or first-strike or escalatory capability, or an intrawar coercive force.

The point was that it could be made fairly cheaply, and actually, virtually surely. But while HK recognized the drawbacks that it might be subject to accidental detonation (especially given the exclusion of human judgment from its operation) and that “it killed too many people” (even in the US: the actual SIOP gave little consideration to killing too many elsewhere, despite concerns voiced by the Navy and Marine Corps and Army, concerns which were ignored by Gates and Eisenhower and not acted upon by anyone, including by leaks).

But I think he gave too little attention, if any, to the risk (actually realized) that the opponent might not believe that a DM (Doomsday Machine) actually existed or that it would actually be turned on, even in a crisis. (Perhaps Kahn can't be blamed for what actually happened in all the cases above, Cuba, NATO and the Dead Hand: the constructor of the DM, to avoid criticism in their own citizens and allies and neutrals, did not inform the opponent of the existence of the DM and its automaticity, kept it secret and even denied it! As in Dr. Strangelove (which a critic regarded as evidence that Kubrick intended to show that nuclear war was virtually impossible; it could occur only as a result of “absurdly unlikely” decisions.)

The US has no more made the nature of its DM transparent and thoroughly credible to its opponent, the SU, than Khrushchev did in Cuba II! (See the secrecy of delegation, and denials; in the US and in NATO.)

Precisely this happened with our “actual, organizational DMs” on both sides:

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a) We couldn't and didn't believe that Khrushchev had actually delivered nuclear warheads to Cuba (given past deployments, and the dangers and "lack of necessity"), OR that he had delegated use of tactical weapons to local commanders; he had "automatized" a nuclear response to our invasion of Cuba, which in turn (he presumably couldn't believe) would virtually automatically (given our first-strike plans) have assured a full-scale SIOP—and nuclear winter.

b) Soviet planning for war in Europe came to be based, in Seventies (?) and Eighties, on their apparent belief that our nuclear response in Europe was not decentralized/automatized by delegation; they hoped to exploit the **delay** in NATO decision time (a delay that would be imposed on the US) by a blitzkrieg non-nuclear attack in Europe. (I take it this was gamed and showed a contrast with earlier Warsaw pact exercises which indicated early use of SU nuclears).

c) We couldn't believe in the existence of a Soviet Dead Hand (despite our own consideration or this and preparations for it): so we aimed at and counted on decapitation (and subsequent "war-fighting").

Thus, whereas **both** sides actually created DM's, neither believed that the other (or realized that itself!) had done so. The worst of all worlds: each believed it had an incentive to preempt, on tactical or perhaps strategic (escalation) warning, an **illusory** advantage and capability of damage-limiting and "prevailing" (Power's "two Americans and one Russian." Did Sen. Russell also say this?). (Actually, MAD was a fact, after 1965; but neither believed it (especially the US: even under McNamara, though he personally probably did believe it, without acting internally as if he did and without making any effort to educate either committees in Congress or the public to this reality) and neither acted as if they believed it. Organizationally, preemption was not only possible but likely in an extreme crisis.)

Each was susceptible to accident or unauthorized action, in addition to false alarm or to preemption on warning (unreliable, whether totally "false" or simply ambiguous: or real, though offering no real hope of damage-limitation or incentive to preempt except to punish).

But preemption of each was made more likely by its mistaken disbelief in the delegation and decentralization of the retaliatory apparatus of the other, leading to a hope that decapitation might actually reduce its retaliation to negligible or acceptable proportions. (i.e., the automaticity of the response was underestimated, as well as the planned scale and the unplanned but likely atmospheric consequences.

All of this may well still apply!

I need to show, both that the US plans can result in Doomsday (nuclear winter); that there is even an organizational likelihood that the Doomsday "option" will actually eventuate in a large nuclear war (the USAF penchant for city-busting, as a form of damage-limitation and prevailing, , and the breakdown of C3, and the general acceptance



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of "maximum revenge" (and for maximum credibility by assuring that it will occur); that there is a great deal of organizational procedure and practice that results in a "probabilistic DM," not totally automatic but approaching that; and that the US has kept this secret (as in Dr. Strangelove) and so has the Soviets and Russians (keeping alive an incentive for preemption on each side). Thus, neither acts as if (in terms of force structure, alert, delegation or planning) it believed in MAD, though that is the reality.